
Art in Dress

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ART IN DRESS

ARTIST'S VIEWS ON WOMAN'S DRESS.

VII.



It is pleasant to find a painter in love with his own times. Such a one is Mr. Elihu Vedder, who affirms that this is the true age of the portrait painter. "Nothing," he declared in a recent talk on the subject, "could be more striking than the toilet of a well-dressed woman of to-day. We are much mistaken if we think the old portrait painters ever had anything better. In Paul Veronese's time the women wore long corsets that pushed them up and pulled them down. From the armpits to the hips there was a straight, stiff waist. Below this the skirt was

gathered and stuck out all around in hard folds which fell unchanged to the feet. Notwithstanding the form, the gorgeous richness of the stuffs made the dress 'paintable;' but it wasn't to be compared to one of the modern French costumes. As a man, I admire them. If I was a man of fashion—and every portrait painter ought to be a man of fashion—there is nothing I would like better than to walk about with one of these dashing modern toilets on my arm." (Here Mr. Vedder got up from his easy chair, laid aside his pipe and performed a bit of expressive pantomime, implying his delight at the mere idea of such a situation.) "But as an artist, I am out of all that sort of thing. I have nothing to do with it." (Fancy Cassandra and the Libyan sibyl in the puffed and shirred skirts that were worn last summer!) "I am out of the whole thing, the age, the time, the day. However, artists do paint modern dress. See what Toulmouche, Alfred Stevens, and those men have done with it. Of course the Greek dress is the best; but we can't have that. We must take the dress of our own time. I am not in sympathy with the æsthetic movement as you see it in London drawing-rooms. French ideas suit us best both in dress and decoration. We are more in accord with the elaborateness of the Louis Quatorze period than with Gothic ideas—the long, lean, and lank, the clasped hands and melancholy poses.

"For centuries we have cut and snipped and spoiled good cloth, and will for centuries to come. I don't see but that we do it as well now as ever. I will admit, though, that a man's dress is hopeless. I never feel well dressed except in fancy-dress—then I suit myself—and when I am in swimming. Then I feel like a man. Look at this Turkish garment; it makes a fine bathing dress, and in Turkish toweling would be stunning." (The garment in question was a plain white tunic, not unlike some of Mr. Millet's costumes.) "It is cut in only two places—those for the hands to pass through. See what a fine thing it is when I put it on. What folds! a man is dressed in it. Now nothing could be better, but it doesn't suit our climate.

"To dress suitably one must take into the account all the conditions. Each person should consider first his needs, then his individuality. One must study one's self, and then dress as one thinks best. That is the way to be picturesque. People always fail when they endeavor to be picturesque. The contadini don't know why they are 'paintable.' And, by the way, we should always want picturesqueness in another country than our own. Look at a railway train in this country emptying itself of people. They are not picturesque, but the contadini would say, 'where are all the poor?'"

"In dress you want specially to contrast breadth with small lines, and there should always be a spot on which to rest the eye, just as in the face we have the cheek. In the draperies of my figures, which are, heaven knows! in little relation to fashionable dress, that is the theory of their construction. This same balancing of lines, which makes Greek dress or any loose drapery beautiful, is just as necessary in tighter draperies. There was a tight dress worn by women not long ago, which was excellent." (Mr. Vedder's knowledge of dress does not seem to include its technicalities, but his pantomime evidently referred to the princesse dress, which, it seems, commends itself to all artists.) "Anything which suggests the beauty of the form is commendable. Who knew there were so many finely rounded arms until women took to tight sleeves? Even if the arm is thin it still shows character, and that gives it value. The same is true of knee-breeches. I admire them. If a man has a good leg, how fine they are! If he hasn't, all the same they are attractive, because they discover the form, and that shows the man. You have probably noticed since young fellows have taken to knickerbockers and Scotch caps how much more interesting illustration has become, in Black's novels for example. All this individuality in dress is a great help to the artist, but we can't push things. To be well dressed is to be in harmony with one's surroundings and with one's self.

"Take natural grace, for example, which is the most exquisite thing in this world. A woman who has this supreme gift can put a handkerchief around her neck and knot it on her breast, with a rose

in the knot, and nothing can be more lovely. But every woman can't do this, for natural grace is something which cannot be acquired. Every woman must study her own style. The trouble is that this requires thought. People conform and follow the fashion, because they are too lazy to think.

"The general artistic progress of the country—that which has given new interest to our homes—is seen in the colors which are now used in dress. As an artist I approve of the tints and the harmonies which we now see in the shop windows. Nobody can object to them. I don't see but that the whole matter is going on all right, provided only that women forswear hoops. If they go back to crinoline then the case is indeed hopeless."

Any one who has read attentively the opinions expressed in these articles must have observed how closely the different artists agree in all essentials. All lay stress on the beauty of the form and the desirability of conforming the garment as nearly as possible to it. The best exemplifications of this idea are the princesse dress and the long polonaise. In both of these we get repose for the eye and that balancing of lines in the lower folds of the drapery which forms in large measure the beauty of the Greek dress. In these costumes is also implied a form of trimming which in all the mutations of fashion has held its own, although few persons have thought worth while to analyze the reasons of its continued and unprecedented popularity. This is kilt plaiting (or, in its best form, fine knife plaiting), which is seen in its best position edging the hems of dress skirts and producing just that contrast of breadth and fine lines which Mr. Vedder mentions among the points of artistic beauty.

MARY GAY HUMPHREYS.

HINTS ON COLOR IN DRESS.

In dress the key-tint is supplied by nature in the complexion, so that all that is left to ourselves is to preserve the proper balance of color. One sometimes hears people say that they cannot wear blue or green, as if blue and green were represented by fixed, invariable tints, and were not subject to innumerable modifications. They do not consider, first, the infinite number of hues which the same color takes from the admixture of others, nor, secondly, that the simple primary is but one of an assemblage of tones, or shades, composing a scale.

Take, for instance, yellow, and suppose it to consist of a scale of five tones, which would be quite sufficient for the requirements of dress. The first would be sulphur-yellow, the second primrose-yellow, the third lemon-yellow, the fourth yolk of egg yellow, the fifth the yellow of the buttercup. Every color belongs to a scale of this kind, and it will easily appear that, although deep blue or green may not suit a particular complexion, a lighter tone of the same color may be worn by the same person with very great advantage. Unless it is wished to reduce a disagreeable natural tint by the opposition of a powerful contrast, nature's key-tint must be taken as the guide, and the corresponding tones selected from the color-scales which are considered favorable to the complexion and hair. Let us take, for the sake of illustration, three shades from among the blondes and from among the brunes of this country, and suppose the colors we use to form a scale of five tones, the third being the normal, or simple primary or secondary.

To begin with the blondes. We should find in No. 1 golden hair of a full tint, a rosy complexion, and blue or gray eyes.

At No. 2 the hair is more brown than golden, and though the complexion is still fair, the eyes are dark gray or brown.

No. 3 borders upon the brune; the hair is a deep rich brown, the eyes dark blue or gray, and the complexion full of color.

In the brunes, No. 1 we find very dark brown hair (approaching to black), hazel eyes, and a brilliant and rosy complexion.

In No. 2 the hair is black, and the eyes are also very dark; the complexion is pale, and, in some instances, sallow.

No. 3 (the brune proper) presents a rich complexion of a slight orange-brown tint, with a full red in the lips and cheeks, and black hair and eyes.

Of course there are more varieties both of blondes and brunes than those enumerated; but, as the same principles apply to extremes, it is not necessary to exemplify more than these.

As the blondes all possess fair complexions and more or less yellow in their hair, it will be seen that blue and green are their most suitable colors; blue, because it forms a harmony of contrast with the hair, and green, because it harmonizes with a rosy complexion. When the color has been selected in accordance with the law of contrast, all that is left is to find the harmonious tone.

Suppose the blue color-scale to consist of the following tones: 1. Turquoise blue. 2. Sapphire blue. 3. Corn-flower blue. 4. The blue of the Delphinium formosum. 5. Indigo blue.

Blonde No. 1 would find her color in blue No. 1 or turquoise blue, No. 2 in sapphire blue, and 3 in the primary, as represented by its type, corn-flower blue. The same rule would apply to green, but, if violet is worn, a tint two or three shades deeper than the complexion should be chosen in order to form a contrast of tone, or it should be associated with its complementary, yellow, to prevent it from exercising its power of eliciting that color.

Neither of the tones of the red scale are very favorable to blondes, although pink may be worn by very fair and delicate people.

Green may also be worn with advantage by some few among the brunes, as well as scarlet and orange, these three presenting agreeable contrasts to the dark hair and eyes peculiar to this type.

The brune would, however, begin to ascend the scale from the

tone at which the blonde stopped. Green No. 3 (or the green of the lime leaf) would be very suitable to brunette No. 1 and No. 4 (the color of the emerald) to the second type. No. 3 would find scarlet, orange, and poppy-color more favorable than green, as the tint of the latter color, which would correspond with her complexion in depth of tone (the green of the ivy leaf), would be of too deep a color to produce a pleasing effect. But when the principles contained in the law of contrast of color and contrast of tone are fully mastered, a mistake of this kind will be of infrequent occurrence.

BIRD AND INSECT DRESS ADORNMENTS.

A LADY writes to The London Times urging upon all women the necessity of setting their faces against the employment of birds in costumes and in bonnets. She says: "I see in reports from America and Africa that those exquisite creatures the humming-birds are rapidly becoming so scarce from the millions that are caught and killed that their total extinction is to be dreaded. Yet, despite this grievous fact, one continues to see costumes trimmed with whole fringes of these fairy-like children of the sun. It is in these things that women, especially women of position, can do so much if they will only reflect and exert themselves. The rough, potting the beautiful storm swallow or the ocean gull, and the great lady wearing fringes of humming-birds are at the extremes of the social scale; but they are on one level in coarseness of fibre and cruelty of act."

The Artist, commenting on the practice against which this protest is made, says truly that it is void of any element of art. Sticking a bird in the hat is a mere barbarism, calling for no exercise of the artistic faculty, and quite within the capacity of a South Sea savage. To avoid such a usage ought to be a rule for those who would help to reform human dress, as well as for those who wish to reform human nature.

This detestable fashion of wearing the stuffed bodies of birds as ornaments for female attire now goes hand in hand with another fashion which, less reprehensible on the score of cruelty, is still more opposed to the suggestions of refined taste: this is the practice of wearing all manner of horribly gaudy and glittering beetles, not only in hats and bonnets, but in various parts of the dress. A writer in a London journal says: "While in a crowd the other day I noticed that a lady immediately in front of me wore such an insect stuck upon one of her shoulders. Formerly it would have been an act of politeness to have brushed away such a beetle-abomination; but now that ladies have laid the insect world under contribution to their vanity, one would run great risk of causing deep displeasure by giving expression to so natural an impulse. Wasps, hornets, caterpillars and cockroaches will all be allowed to nestle soon near the damask cheek of our fashionable beauties. Then reptiles and fishes will have their day. The stuffed adder will replace the necklace of pearls, and one does not need Mother Shipton's prophetic vision to foresee that the fashionable hat of the coming period will have for its chief ornament a lobster looking round the brim, or a mackerel sitting on its tail."

THE PROCESS OF "CRYSTAL PAINTING."

In answer to many correspondents, we would say that "crystal painting," "Grecian painting," and "cameo oil-painting" are the different names given by travelling "professors" to a very simple method of illuminating photographs, or prints of any kind that have no printing on the back and that are not on too thick paper. The prints, first made transparent, are so placed between convex glasses as to give the appearance of porcelain or ivory. Usually the process is shrouded in mystery by the "professor" for the purpose of extracting a fat fee from the pupil to whom he imparts the secret. There is little art in it, for the limits as to finish are very restricted; but to the uncritical eye the effects produced are often very attractive. For decorative purposes the process may often be used with gratifying results. The work, as we have indicated, is very easy. Indeed, with a little taste for coloring, a child with no knowledge of drawing may produce, with the basis of a few common photographic prints, a showy-looking lot of pictures, which, in the eyes of the uninitiated, will stamp him as a very prodigy in art.

The process is fully described as follows by Mr. W. A. Russ in The Floral Cabinet, beginning with the preparation of the materials:

No. 1. *The Paste*.—Take one sheet of transparent gelatine, to be obtained at any apothecary-store at a trifling cost; half a teaspoonful of nitrate of strontia, also inexpensive; one teaspoonful and a half of corn starch. Mix in six ounces of water; put it on the stove and allow it to just come to a boil.

No. 2. *The Transparent Mixture*.—One ounce balsam of fir; one ounce poppy oil; one half-ounce spirits of turpentine. Mix these together in a bottle and keep corked except when using.

No. 3. *The Varnish*.—One ounce balsam of fir, one half-ounce spirits of turpentine, mixed.

Now, take the photograph you wish to color, place it in a dish of clean boiling water and let it remain until the thin paper on which the picture is can be taken off easily. If it does not start before the water gets cool, pour it off and put in fresh hot water. When the picture has been finally detached from the card, place it between two sheets of clean blotting-paper to remove the superfluous moisture. There is no necessity, however, for allowing it to become perfectly dry.